

instead a series of air attacks on the base areas just across the Cambodian border.

This proposal lay on the table when President Nixon set off on his European trip on February 23. It then became entwined with the question of how to respond to a new and widespread series of attacks on U.S. units and installations, attacks that doubled the American casualty rate (to 336, 453, and 351 in successive weeks). Since the demilitarized zone was not substantially violated and action against cities was limited, the attacks were at most a marginal violation of the understandings accompanying the October 1968 bombing halt. Yet Nixon saw them as a test. In his quandary he turned naturally to the Abrams/JCS project for air attacks in Cambodia; on March 17 a large-scale B-52 attack was carried out against the "Fish Hook" area, about halfway up the border.

From the first, Nixon intended the Cambodian bombing to be totally secret. Even the Secretary and Chief of Staff of the Air Force were kept in ignorance. Nixon expressly rejected Melvin Laird's urging to inform selected members of Congress, and he had the military devise a system of double bookkeeping under which strikes on targets within Cambodia were reported as having taken place in South Vietnam.¹⁹

Clearly the decisive reason for the secrecy was domestic. Any disclosure of the bombing or supportive arguments for it would have aroused Congress and the public and contradicted the image of careful deliberation and gradual withdrawal.

On May 9, however, *The New York Times* carried a story by its Pentagon correspondent, William Beecher, that there had been B-52 raids on targets in Cambodia, that Sihanouk had said he would not object to them, and that the bombing was meant as a signal to Hanoi that Nixon was different and "tougher" than Johnson had been. To Nixon and Kissinger, this disclosure, which was of course accurate, seemed devastating. Within hours the FBI was ordered to use wiretaps to identify the supposed "leakers," and shortly installed taps on the phones of several members of the NSC and Pentagon staffs singled out by Kissinger or his deputy, Alexander Haig. Four years later, these wiretaps were disclosed and became part of the Watergate scandal.

Remarkably, however, neither the media nor anyone in Congress picked up Beecher's story. It simply died away. This was the more remarkable since the bombing had become by then a systematic program, in large part because of an incident over the Sea of Japan, off Korea. North Korean fighter planes shot down an unarmed U.S. EC-121 patrol aircraft, in daylight and with no possibility of mistaken identity, with the loss of the entire crew of 31 men. The American plane was on a routine reconnaissance mission of a kind that had been conducted for years without interference or protest, and was well outside any definition of North Korean territorial waters.²⁰

Faced now with his own parallel crisis—and inclined as always to see it as a personal challenge—Nixon found his top Cabinet advisors, Rogers and Laird, opposed to a military response, while Ambassador William Porter in South Korea suggested that such a response might trigger further incidents (or more) on the main truce-line front in Korea. The President kept his own counsel, venting his rage and frustration only to Kissinger and Haig. In the end he limited the American response to providing fighter escorts for future reconnaissance operations.

Not to retaliate was for Nixon a painful choice, and one he claimed later to regret. Already he wanted to use the threat of drastic use of airpower as a clincher with the Soviet Union and North Vietnam; at the very least, he wished to depict himself as capable of such action, however irrational it might appear and however far from the norms of American behavior during even the gravest Cold War crises in 1948 and 1962. This was the "madman theory" he stated at intervals to his intimate associates. In the late summer of 1968 he spoke of it to his chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, in a fashion that seemed genuine to a listener accustomed to his blowing off steam. Years later, Haldeman described the theory as "clearly one of the tools in his kit":

He believed conceptually that it was important that the enemy and those counseling or controlling the enemy as then perceived in Vietnam, have, if not a conviction, at least a concern that he might be pushed to a point where he might do something totally irrational. That was a strategic concept, not a planned intent, and there was never any consideration given to doing anything to carry out the "madman" theory.

Asked whether the last part of this definition meant that it was in fact a bluff, Haldeman said that it was.²¹ This much later interpretation is open to question. There were times, as other parts of this book suggest, when Nixon really meant to carry out the threats he made. But whether bluff or real intent, making such threats was a persistent element in Nixon's approach to his dealings with North Vietnam and the Soviet Union.

In April 1969, when he was persuaded to refrain from a drastic response to the EC-121 shootdown, Nixon cast around for a strong action that Moscow and its satellites would respect. The weapon to hand was the bombing of Cambodia—hurting the Communists there and also showing that the President was prepared to go to extremes even in minor situations.

Thus, what had initially been a one-shot policy now became systematic. It disregarded any uncertainty as to whether increased bombing in Cambodia would register forcibly on North Korea's President, Kim Il Sung, two thousand miles away, or on the Soviet leaders in Moscow. Nixon was simply acting from a reflexive desire to hit back at some Communist somewhere,

a response rationalized only by his propensity to see all actions by Asian Communist countries as interlinked and perhaps coordinated. Since Kim Il Sung was a notorious rogue and maverick, few if any serious observers shared this way of thinking. It was the "true believer" at his trust.

When it became a regular program, the secret B-52 bombing of Cambodia acquired the unappealing name of Menu, with successive meal names assigned to individual groups of raids. Between May and August 1969 there were about ten more strikes on individual orders from Washington; after that, authority was given to Abrams and the regional air commanders to continue them as military needs and intelligence indicated. As this expansion got underway, a very few selected members of Congress were told about it, beginning with a "full briefing" (by Nixon and Kissinger personally) on June 11 of Senators Richard Russell and John Stennis. The two were chairmen, respectively, of the Senate Armed Services and Appropriations committees, the two congressional positions (usually the only two) that by long-standing tradition were informed by the CIA of covert operations. Later, according to Kissinger, a few other senators and selected congressmen were "briefed" as well.²² But the briefings totally excluded the Democratic leadership and the Foreign Relations committees of both chambers, though the program was a major change in policy toward neutral Cambodia, not simply another military operation on a new scale, still less a covert CIA operation. In describing in his memoirs what was done, Kissinger was to write that he came to regret not having been "more frank" with the Congress, which suggests that even these disclosures to limited circles were less than all-embracing.

Even as the bombing went on, Nixon's State Department followed up belatedly on the Bowles visit by moving to reestablish diplomatic relations. In August a small mission was installed in Phnom Penh, headed not by an ambassador but by a medium-senior Foreign Service officer, Lloyd Rives, who had with him a skeleton staff that included no old Cambodia hands or intelligence experts on Communist movements in Indochina.

Thus, U.S. policy toward Cambodia was on two distinct tracks, one publicly restoring relations and reiterating total respect for the country's neutrality, and another secretly treating its eastern border areas as a war zone subject to massive air attack. Nixon and Kissinger later made much of the fact that Sihanouk never publicly referred to the bombing in any way, although the devastation of each raid can hardly have failed to come to his attention. No doubt he felt helpless; certainly no attempt was ever made to explain to him just what was going on. And almost certainly the secret bombing affected the situation within Cambodia. Its greater importance to Nixon, however, was as a possible warning to North Vietnam and above all as a demonstration to the Soviet Union that he was indeed capable of extreme and irrational response. In effect, the sixth element in Nixon's

Indochina policy—taking a leaf from Eisenhower's book—was to use the threat of drastic air action as an ultimate form of pressure on the Soviet Union to go all out to induce North Vietnam to move toward peace. Just such a threat was secretly conveyed to North Vietnam and the Soviet Union in what became the centerpiece of his Indochina War policy in 1969.

3. Rebuff and Recovery

Early in the 1968 campaign, Nixon had spoken of enlisting the Soviet Union to work for peace in Indochina by a combination of "political, economic, and diplomatic" pressures. But North Vietnam's relationships to China and Russia were complex and subject to conflicting and often directly opposed forces. On the one hand, Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong were fiercely independent; their ambition to control all of Indochina was totally their own. On the other, they had come to depend on moral and material support from the U.S.S.R. and China, first in their struggle to evict the French and then as they fought from 1959 onward. That Moscow and Beijing might put their own interests and concerns ahead of all-out support for North Vietnam had been amply demonstrated in 1954, when both—reluctant after the Korean War to have a new military confrontation—put great (and deeply resented) pressure on Hanoi to accept the division of Vietnam at the 17th parallel and neutrality for Laos and Cambodia.

To be sure, all three almost certainly believed that the partition of Vietnam would not last and that in a few years Hanoi would take over the South, by ballot or bullet, and go on to succeed France in controlling all of Indochina. But such a prospect was at best only tolerable to China, which had its own plans for increased influence in Southeast Asia as well as a long-standing hostility toward Vietnam.

To this complex brew was added the growing breach between China and the U.S.S.R. After the ouster of Khrushchev in October 1964, followed by Hanoi's decision to send regular conventional forces into South Vietnam and the start of U.S. bombing of the North, Soviet policy moved to take advantage of the opportunity to become North Vietnam's major supplier of sophisticated military equipment and thus to diminish Chinese influence.²³ Far from drawing China and the Soviet Union together, the serious fighting in Vietnam in 1965 led to friction over the passage of Soviet supplies through China, and then to a division of labor that beneath a veneer of cooperation was highly competitive. Hanoi remained able to play off one against the other, with the threat of moving closer to a generous donor at the expense of the less helpful one. When the chips were down and Hanoi really pressed hard, both came through handsomely, as in their support for the buildup before the Tet and later 1968 Communist offensives.

By early 1969, it was generally believed that Soviet influence in Hanoi was significantly greater than Chinese. On the other hand, to the extent that the Soviet Union got involved in any effort to bring peace in Vietnam, it would expose itself to a loss of influence in Hanoi and to the general charge, within the Communist camp, of letting down a fellow socialist state—violating “international solidarity.” Most of all, it stood to lose ground in the continuing rivalry with China. These complexities almost certainly had little place in Richard Nixon’s mind: to him the Soviet Union was potentially as decisive as it had been in getting the Korean armistice in 1953. The question was how best to put pressure on it.

In one of his early press conferences Nixon took the position that negotiations toward arms control should go alongside an easing of political problems in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. But even this modest form of “linkage” attracted critical comment, especially in the Eastern press. Kennedy and Johnson, like Eisenhower before them, had always accepted what might be called normal atmospheric links among Soviet-related matters—had seen that fruitful negotiations with the U.S.S.R. on any major subject were unlikely in periods of acute tension—but all three had believed that the main bilateral discussion track, especially on nuclear weapons, was and should be kept somewhat separate from ongoing rivalries in regional situations. Thus to link strategic arms talks to progress in a regional rivalry was in itself significant.

In fact, Nixon had had much more in mind all along. In his first meeting with Johnson on July 26, 1968, discussing what then looked like a possible early meeting between Johnson and a top Soviet leader, Nixon interjected vigorously that the question must be: “Can we do anything until Vietnam is off the burner?”²⁴ For a time he meant exactly this. Over and over again, according to Kissinger, he told Dobrynin that there could be no meaningful progress or agreement *on any subject whatever*, no change in the atmosphere of the relationship, unless the Soviet Union really and usefully influenced North Vietnam toward peace. This secret policy went well beyond what he said in public. Given the apparent and latent importance of arms control and trade alone, it was the strongest kind of “political, economic and diplomatic” pressure possible to put on the Soviet Union—economic sanctions being in effect already in place under long-standing policies.

Basic to Nixon’s approach was the judgment that if the Soviet Union truly chose to do so, it could exert decisive leverage on North Vietnam. From the first, Nixon and Kissinger considered that relationships within the Communist sphere were extremely hierarchical, with Communist movements controlled by nearby larger ones, and these in turn by either the Soviet Union or China, with the Soviet Union dominant where it chose to be. This view, evident again and again in their actions and decisions, stemmed in part from a general sense that internal or external power always

flowed from the top. In larger part it reflected a predominantly ideological view of Communist nations and movements, downgrading and often totally discounting the influence of nationalist sentiment and national concerns. American Presidents before Nixon were often rightly criticized for inadequately recognizing these nationalist factors—such as the deep-seated historical hostility between China and Vietnam—but there had been important exceptions, for example the Truman Administration’s recognition of Tito in Yugoslavia as more nationalist than Communist at least in his behavior toward Moscow. With Nixon and Kissinger, there were no exceptions: nowhere in the memoirs of either man does one find a remotely adequate recognition of nationalist factors in situations with Communist labels.

Always well aware that Moscow’s military and economic material support of Hanoi was indispensable to North Vietnam’s effort to take over the South, President Johnson and his advisors nonetheless treated Soviet relations as a top priority in their own right, seeking Soviet restraint and help for peace in Indochina but not making such action a prerequisite. At the height of American involvement in Vietnam there had been fairly close Soviet-American cooperation over the problem of nuclear nonproliferation, for example, as well as ready U.S. endorsement of NATO’s 1967 Harmel Report, which made détente with the Soviet Union in Europe an accepted objective. Even in the Middle East, though the United States and the U.S.S.R. took opposite sides in the Arab-Israeli confrontation, Johnson did not make a big public issue of the Soviet Union’s egging on Syria and Egypt before the 1967 War.

Essentially, both Nixon and Kissinger thought this position wrong and ineffective, “softheaded,” as they said in private. They thought that serious talks about strategic weapons or concessions on trade and the conditions for private economic dealings were favors the United States could grant or withhold—and should now make conditional on specific Soviet help toward peace in Vietnam.

This was a major policy reversal, for which Nixon appears to have had extraordinarily high hopes. He, and on occasion Kissinger, repeatedly told their colleagues that they thought there would be crucial progress toward ending the Vietnam War within a year.

By July 1969, the stated negotiating positions of the United States and South Vietnam included several concessions: that eventual total withdrawals on both sides would be completed at the same time; that North Vietnam’s withdrawal need only be carried out, not necessarily admitted; and that the NLF—just changing its name to Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG), to give itself greater status—could participate in elections and even in a commission to lay down the rules for elections. These useful concessions underscored the two basic differences that remained: First, the United

States still proposed to leave Thieu's regime in control of the political process, a position totally at odds with Hanoi's continuing demands that it first be removed, and that a coalition government be created with the PRG in a strong position in it. Second, North Vietnam continued to refuse to discuss troop withdrawal on its part, a position obviously likely to become even firmer as the United States went ahead with unilateral withdrawals. Why give up something for what is coming your way in any case? These extreme positions were plainly unacceptable, but it must also be noted that Nixon's underlying readiness to accept an evenly balanced political process in South Vietnam was always open to doubt, his firm objective all along being to preserve Thieu's regime or its equivalent. On this point, his public statements throw little light. More revealing was his private briefing when he stopped in Bangkok in the course of his world trip. He told a group of American ambassadors in East Asia, as one present remembered it, that "any satisfactory settlement must leave behind a government which would be able to stand for at least five years." By this he plainly meant a non-communist government with no serious participation by the PRG or its like.²⁵

In short, as everyone was becoming aware, no real progress had been made at all. Nixon faced the prospect of a "massive new antiwar tide" of demonstrations in the fall and winter, plus a possible renewed Communist offensive in early 1970. By spring, with midterm congressional elections in sight, this "would make congressional demands for more troop withdrawals impossible to stop and difficult to ignore." At the same time, he noted an apparent lull in the fighting in Vietnam, along with indications that some North Vietnamese units were actually being returned to the North. Sometime in July he therefore decided to play what for him had always been the key card:

I decided to "go for broke" in the sense that I would attempt to end the war one way or the other—either by negotiated agreement or by an increased use of force....

After half a year of sending peaceful signals to the Communists, I was ready to use whatever military pressure was necessary to prevent them from taking over South Vietnam by force. During several long sessions, Kissinger and I developed an elaborate orchestration of diplomatic, military and publicity pressures we would bring to bear on Hanoi.

I decided to set Nov. 1, 1969—the first anniversary of Johnson's bombing halt—as the deadline for what would in effect be an ultimatum to North Vietnam.²⁶

One step in carrying out this plan was to give the Soviet Union a last chance by offering it a mixture of "carrots," visions of rewards and gains,

with "sticks," hints that something more drastic might happen if it failed to seize the carrots. This task fell to Kissinger, using "the Channel" for an exceptionally long session with Ambassador Dobrynin on July 12. Dobrynin was about to leave for Moscow and perhaps the Crimea, where the top leaders usually vacationed; both trips were leading up to a possible serious high-level review of Soviet policies toward the United States and the Indochina War. In this rare instance, we have the *Soviet* record of what was said, rather than Kissinger's (or Nixon's) summary. Dobrynin's report to Moscow, which ran to nearly 4,000 words, showed Kissinger covering many subjects in a generally conciliatory tone—stating American acceptance of a divided Germany and especially of Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe, among other comments. After noting that China had shown no signs of readiness "to carry out a more peaceful policy towards the USA" but might be bidding for decisive influence in Hanoi, Kissinger came to the main point.²⁷ His appeal was twofold: On the one hand, he held out the prospect of many, perhaps annual, summit meetings for businesslike discussion of all current problems; this would be an elevation to continuing coequal superpower status, which he doubtless thought would have special appeal. On the other hand, he insisted not only that Soviet help over Vietnam was the prerequisite to "a really serious improvement in Soviet-American relations" but that "if Hanoi will endlessly 'obstruct' the negotiations, then it will be necessary for the [American] government to think about 'other alternatives in order to convince Hanoi.'" In his report to Moscow, Dobrynin added that this "sufficiently firm-sounding theme . . . cannot but be noted." He thought it suggested renewed bombing of North Vietnam or other military measures, and commented that it was not possible to "entirely exclude the possibility of such actions."²⁸

Immediately after this, on July 15, Nixon sent a personal letter to Ho Chi Minh himself, secret at the time but meant to be made public at the right moment. This was conciliatory in tone, though it gave no new ground. Then, a few days later, Nixon was at pains to tell the heads of government in Romania and Pakistan that his patience was wearing thin and that November 1 was a deadline after which the United States might move to drastic action of some sort. Just what was never stated, but clearly his model was Eisenhower's equally vague threat directed at China in 1953. If, like Lincoln, this President had been a student of Shakespeare, the thought could have been summarized in the words of King Lear: "I shall do such things—what they are yet I know not, but they shall be the terror of the earth."

At the end of Nixon's trip, Kissinger stopped off in Europe, ostensibly to brief leaders there on the trip and the Nixon Doctrine, actually to have a first truly secret talk with the North Vietnamese Paris negotiator, Xuan Thuy. This took place on August 4 at the apartment of Jean Sainteny, and (by Kissinger's later account) consisted mostly of restatements of "estab-

lished positions in a less contentious manner." Xuan Thuy indicated distaste for third-country intermediaries and they agreed that General Vernon Walters, U.S. military attaché in Paris, should be the channel to arrange future meetings.

What Xuan Thuy's report to Hanoi must have stressed most, however, was surely Kissinger's opening statement, a message from Nixon that concluded:

In all solemnity . . . if by November 1 no major progress has been made toward a solution, we will be compelled—with great reluctance—to take measures of the greatest consequences.²⁹

When the same message was conveyed to Dobrynin on Kissinger's return, the circuits were closed. Since February the Soviet Union had been on notice that everything in the relationship remained in abeyance until and unless it helped over Vietnam. Now Moscow was being threatened as well as Hanoi, with an ultimatum that in its directness, its explicit date, and its implied weight of threat, may have been as strong as any in the whole course of the Cold War.

At the end of August, Ho Chi Minh replied to Nixon's letter, in a stiff tone and with no give at all. He was in fact in very bad health, and died on September 3. Although people had occasionally speculated whether his death might in some way change North Vietnamese policy, it was at once clear that it did not.

By mid-September, then, as Nixon felt impelled to announce the second troop withdrawal, there was neither response nor action plan. At this point Haig and one or two other NSC staffers set to work with the Pentagon on various escalation measures. These plans, labeled Duck Hook, included intense renewed bombing of the North and mining of the port of Haiphong. Later in the month, Nixon met twice with Republican leaders and suggested the possibility of even stronger military action. When this news predictably leaked out, it was the first Rogers and Laird knew of it; they urged against any such course.³⁰ With the antiwar movement set to conduct large "moratorium" demonstrations on October 15 and November 15, Kissinger and then Nixon were gradually persuaded (in part by courageous staff members) that any such escalation would trigger unbearable reactions in much of the Congress and public alike. Years later, Nixon said on television that abandoning Duck Hook was the worst decision of his presidency and that if carried through relentlessly it could have ended the war in 1969. This is typical of the bravado of his later years, expressed also in similar comments about the EC-121 incident. But it is unrealistic to suppose that, given the public mood at home—and in the face of likely Soviet reactions—drastic

action could have been sustained for long enough to get Hanoi to back down.³¹

Nixon did make one further try at scaring the Soviet Union into action. When Kissinger and Dobrynin met in the usual way on September 27, Nixon by prearrangement called Kissinger and had him convey, as if impromptu, a message that "the train just left the station and is now headed down the track"—to which Kissinger added that it was up to Moscow to make a move.³²

The Soviet leadership made no attempt to reply. Instead, on October 20, Dobrynin at his request saw Nixon to deliver the message that Moscow was now ready for the strategic arms talks formally proposed in June. Nixon took the occasion to speak very roughly about not being "diddled to death," and threatened to move ahead with China while piously disclaiming that this might be aimed at the U.S.S.R. He emphasized that

the Soviet Union is going to be stuck with me for the next three years and three months, and during all that time I will keep in mind what is being done right now, today. If the Soviet Union will not help us get peace, then we will have to pursue our own methods for bringing the war to an end.

This was a less strong threat than the September one, and came with a carrot: if Moscow did help in Vietnam he might "do something dramatic to improve our relations, indeed, something more dramatic than could be imagined."³³

As Nixon thus pulled back from what he himself described as "the ultimatum," his memoirs depict him as aware that without some "indisputably good reason" for not acting on it, "the Communists would become contemptuous and even more difficult to deal with." The indisputably good reason was, of course, the moratorium demonstrations, which had "undercut the credibility of the 'ultimatum.'³⁴ This was a feeble excuse: Nixon himself had said publicly, three weeks before, that under no circumstances would he permit himself to be affected by public opposition to a resumption of bombing. One must conclude that his successive military threats were all along bluffs never intended to be carried out—of just the sort he himself had said should never occur in dealings with the Soviet Union.

From this low point—unknown to the public—Nixon made a remarkable recovery, as often in his career. On October 13 he announced he would make a major TV speech on November 3, for which he received advice from many quarters, of which two in particular registered in different ways. The Senate Majority Leader, Mike Mansfield, a consistent "dove" since at least 1963, urged that he announce a rapid and total U.S. withdrawal—a more extreme position than that of almost any of his Senate colleagues and

a perfect target for Nixon to attack. In contrast, Dean Acheson urged that the speech soft-pedal the negotiating possibilities, avoid any firm timetable on withdrawal, continue to stress Vietnamization, and make a special plea to rally "emotionally around the flag," which he thought would drown out the demonstrators, "whom Acheson believed represented only a small fraction of the population."³⁵

Probably Nixon was already thinking on similar lines. In his speech, conciliatory and reasonable in tone though sharply critical of Johnson's past policies, he argued that prompt withdrawal would be a catastrophe for America's standing worldwide and offered instead the twin recipe of negotiation and Vietnamization. Listing the several concessions in the formal U.S. negotiating position, he made special use of the exchange of letters with Ho and the two exchanges via Sainteny (without naming him) to show how far he had gone and what a rigid response he'd gotten, and also referred to efforts to enlist Soviet help. Not surprisingly, he made no mention of the clumsiness of his attempts, the failure to get into serious secret talks, or the threats he had made to the Soviet Union. He spoke proudly of the sharply reduced U.S. casualty rate under Abrams's newly defined mission (which the President had accepted only reluctantly), and offered a future program of withdrawals pegged to progress being made in the negotiations and above all to what he claimed was the increasing ability of the South Vietnamese to fend for themselves.

In short, he proclaimed a policy of controlled reduction in the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. He made no reference to the continued large-scale use of airpower in South Vietnam and gave no hint of the bombing of Cambodia. At the end, he appealed eloquently and explicitly to the patriotic instincts of a "silent majority" of the public, while linking his policy to the goal of "a just and lasting peace."

It was a superbly crafted speech, delivered at just the right emotional moment when the country was at a peak of anxiety over the antiwar demonstrations, undecided, and in need of a show of leadership. That it offered nothing that had not been spelled out over the past several months, that it contained nasty subliminal messages against the antiwar movement and all of Nixon's adversaries, were features scarcely noted by what probably was indeed a "silent majority" of the public. Beneath its appeal to unity, the speech was actually divisive and so intended, not least in setting up the media themselves as scapegoats for American distress about the war. But for most of Nixon's audience it was his presidential tone, clarity, and apparent candor that mattered most.

The response was highly favorable. The President's approval rating in the polls, which had been steadily in the 50–60 percent range, rose to 68 percent. As important, the House of Representatives shortly adopted, by an overwhelming vote, a resolution supporting the President's policy. In the

Senate, where it might have produced sharp dissent, a more general letter of support was finally signed by 58 senators. As Nixon claimed, the speech and its reception put him in a much stronger position to deal with Hanoi and other nations.

After that, a second moratorium demonstration on November 15 in Washington drew a tremendous (and orderly) attendance of an estimated 250,000. This was shortly followed by the revelation of a terrible massacre by U.S. troops in the village of My Lai in South Vietnam. The massacre had occurred in March 1968, before Nixon's time, and for some it simply added to a contrast between the war under his leadership and Johnson's. For others, it increased the feeling of disgust: public opinion polls by then showed a strong majority believing that sending large U.S. forces to Vietnam had been a mistake.³⁶

On December 15, Nixon went on television again to announce a further withdrawal of 50,000 troops by April 1970. In his statement he made much of an upbeat assessment of the situation by Sir Robert Thompson, who had been a senior British official when a Communist insurgency had been defeated in Malaya in the 1950s and still had considerable prestige, especially with Nixon, as an expert on the Vietnam situation.³⁷

In sum, Nixon did a remarkable job of staking out and getting public support for the policy toward the Indochina War represented by his public words and actions. What he had actually done and intended was in fact a very different policy, known only to a few White House officials. The outwardly confident Nixon must inwardly have been well aware of the discrepancy: he had, after all, planned it that way. He must also have known that his Communist adversaries in Hanoi and Moscow had in effect faced him down, showing up his threats as bluff. The memory of successive failures to act or to get a Soviet response may have rankled deeply and formed a big part of the mood in which he approached the new year.

4. Strategic Arms Control

Throughout Nixon's first year, as we have seen, there was constant reference to future negotiations aimed at a genuine agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union to control strategic nuclear weapons. Nixon encouraged this hope by an early statement that seemed to disavow the goal of maintaining U.S. nuclear superiority, and to adopt instead an objective of simple "sufficiency."

Strategic arms control, when first attempted under President Eisenhower in the 1950s, had focused on the testing of new nuclear weapons. Building on his efforts, in 1963 President Kennedy achieved a Limited Test Ban Treaty, putting an end to atmospheric testing and thus significantly restrain-

the day against the radicals and the Lin Biao faction in the fall of 1970, he could well have argued that the U.S. pullout from Cambodia proved it.

The White House watched the Chinese reaction to the Laos operation closely. Though Beijing denounced it on February 4, at the same time the Deputy Foreign Minister told the Norwegian Ambassador that China was aware of a new trend in American policy. At a press conference on February 17, Nixon was at pains to say that the Laos offensive was not directed against "Communist China"; a week later his second Foreign Policy Report corrected this outdated label, referring to the People's Republic of China by that name. Then, on March 15, drawing from the State Department's long-standing list of appropriate conciliatory moves, Nixon authorized it to announce the end to all restrictions on the use of U.S. passports for travel to China.⁵

By then the ignominious South Vietnamese retreat from Laos, with U.S. forces assisting the evacuation but making no move to get directly involved on the ground, must have helped persuade the Chinese leaders that the United States was indeed sticking to a course of withdrawal. Any remaining doubts were surely laid to rest when Nixon, in April, announced that a further 100,000 U.S. troops would be withdrawn from Vietnam between May 1 and December. The 150,000-man reduction announced a year before was about to be completed, bringing total strength down to 284,000. The new announcement meant a drop to 184,000 by December, with combat units reduced even more proportionately.⁶

That spring, the World Table Tennis Championship in Nagoya, Japan, included teams from both China and America. On April 6 the Chinese team invited the Americans to visit China. Given a green light by an alert officer at the American Embassy in Tokyo, the team accepted. "Ping-Pong diplomacy" became an instant rage in the media, and ears pricked up all over the world when the team was warmly received in China. Nixon then drew again from the list of possible conciliatory actions, modifying the long-standing embargo on trade with mainland China, for example.

On April 27 Ambassador Hilaly delivered another handwritten note from Zhou to Nixon. Any fundamental restoration of Sino-American relations required the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Taiwan and the Straits area, Zhou wrote, a subject that required direct discussion, for which China would be prepared to receive a special envoy "(for instance Mr. Kissinger)" or the Secretary of State "or even the President." All arrangements could be worked out through the Pakistani President, Yahya Khan. Within a day Nixon picked Kissinger for the mission, and Kissinger promptly instructed the American Ambassador to Pakistan, Joseph Farland, to start detailed planning, using a special communication link to the White House. On May 10, Nixon's reply to Zhou stressed that the first meeting

should be secret. Once again, he said that each side must be free to raise any subject it wished.⁷

Kissinger has argued that any announcement or even hint of his trip would have set off a barrage of speculation as well as requests for information and reassurance, especially from allied countries in East Asia. This was a valid argument, and secrecy, as both Nixon and Kissinger knew, was also some protection against the possibility, by now very slight, that the trip would end in failure. But above all, Nixon did not want to detract from the drama of his eventual announcement.⁸

In a note delivered on June 2 by Ambassador Hilaly, Zhou accepted and suggested a late June date; Nixon responded with July 9–11, and on June 11 Zhou agreed to those dates. The next weeks were spent arranging a plausible schedule for Kissinger's trip, and working out all the details with the Pakistani government and the Chinese.

This secret process was in full swing when *The New York Times*, on June 13, began to publish excerpts from what came to be called the Pentagon Papers, a massive compilation of documents (many of them top secret) concerning U.S. policy in Vietnam from 1945 to 1967–68, prepared secretly in the last year of the Johnson Administration at the direction of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. The documents, almost all drawn from Defense Department files, were accompanied by narrative chapters written by individual participants in the study. In each installment, the *Times* drew on the documents but set the tone with new lead stories by its own staff to highlight and expound on their meaning. The first of these lead stories, by Neil Sheehan, a veteran reporter of the Vietnam War, to whom the Papers had been given, focused on the early summer of 1964, prior to the Gulf of Tonkin incident. It put the documents in a harsh light, suggesting a high degree of deception, which quickly became the keynote of comment about the Papers.

At once Nixon saw that the release and commentary were damaging to the Kennedy Administration and especially the Johnson Administration, but left no stain on his own Administration, indeed tended to put it in a good light by comparison. There was thus a first inclination in the White House to stand aside and let the Democrats take the heat. Not so with Kissinger. It quickly emerged that the Papers had been turned over to Sheehan and the *Times* by Daniel Ellsberg, an extremely bright and zealous man who had been in the Defense Department in 1964 and on a special mission in South Vietnam in 1965–66. At that time Ellsberg was very hard-line in his views, but by 1968 (after he participated in the compilation of the Pentagon Papers), he was a sharp critic of the war and favored early withdrawal.

Kissinger had known and briefly taught Ellsberg at Harvard, and also seen him in Vietnam in 1965-66. In early 1969 Kissinger chose Ellsberg to participate in his overall review of the Vietnam situation. Ellsberg soon joined the staff of the Rand Corporation and had access to the copy of the Papers that resided there. He became convinced that the record should be made public, and he first offered the Papers to Senator Fulbright of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. When Fulbright refused to be the channel, Ellsberg gave the Papers to his friend Neil Sheehan, in the spring of 1971.⁹

At just that juncture, Kissinger was consumed by the need for secrecy about his China dealings. He therefore urged that such breaches of secrecy within government be dealt with harshly, for he feared not unreasonably, that the Chinese might conclude that the American government was too harassed and insecure to be a useful partner.¹⁰ His own past ties to Ellsberg must also have been embarrassing. At Kissinger's urging Nixon took a very tough line. In quick succession the Justice Department tried (unsuccessfully) to get a prepublication injunction but did obtain an indictment of Ellsberg for theft of government materials. The stage was set for further White House skulduggery against Ellsberg.

On June 30, the White House announced that Kissinger was shortly to leave on a fact-finding trip to Vietnam, that he would wind up by consulting Ambassador David Bruce in Paris on the state of the peace talks, and that along the way he would stop in Thailand, India, and Pakistan. This neat design, putting the Pakistan stop in low key, went off exactly as planned. It was Kissinger's first solo trip abroad. His purposes seemed straightforward, and the American press gave him only routine coverage and was completely taken in by the security scenario worked out with Yahya Khan in Pakistan.

Four hours after his arrival in Beijing, Kissinger met with Zhou for nearly seven hours, and the talks continued for two more days. From the first, the two men hit it off, a big step forward in itself. Both were most at home discussing issues in broad strategic terms, and each enjoyed the other's cut and thrust. This personal rapport was to continue for three years. Its only disadvantage was that the new Sino-American relationship became heavily dependent on it.¹¹

A quarter century later, the record of these talks is still kept secret, but it is possible to develop a reasonably full picture on the basis of fragments of direct evidence and later comments by Kissinger. Apparently Taiwan was discussed only briefly at the outset. One American participant recalls that Kissinger's opening statement opined that the United States did not support any notion of two Chinas, or one China and one Taiwan, but recognized that there was only a single China. This seemed to break the ice almost at once.¹² Both Zhou and Kissinger, then, treated Taiwan as a topic to be got out of the way. Zhou left the clear impression that China was in no hurry

to take it over, and that as long as the United States was honestly moving in the direction of withdrawal from Taiwan and formal recognition of Beijing, the Taiwan issue—and a continued absence of formal relations—need not interfere with the two governments coming closer together. Contrary to what many China watchers had supposed, resolution of the Taiwan problem was not a prior condition to progress on other issues.

Along the way, Zhou volunteered a lengthy comment on the recent Cultural Revolution, with hints on how bad it had been for him and other moderates. Discussing China's internal turmoil was another sign of confidence and intimacy. Obviously he meant to emphasize that he spoke for what was now a stable Chinese leadership.¹³

On Indochina, Kissinger explained U.S. policy and discussed at some length his talks with Le Duc Tho. (In his memoirs he noted that Zhou was a rare Asian statesman who understood clearly by early 1970 that the United States was indeed getting out of Indochina. This must surely have been based on their first talks.¹⁴ Kissinger must also have suggested that China might exert influence on Hanoi to be more reasonable in peace talks, but in his report to Nixon he "doubted that the Chinese leaders could or would do much to help directly." This probably also meant that Zhou gave no hint that China would reduce its material and military aid to North Vietnam. In fact, this flow continued at a high rate for more than a year.¹⁵

Whereas Zhou wanted America out of Indochina as soon as possible, elsewhere in East Asia he saw, or came to see, that a continued large American role and presence could be in China's national interest. The East Asian problem most on his mind was the threat of a more activist and nationalist Japan. No Chinese mindful of Japan's behavior toward China in World War II could possibly not have had this worry when Japan reemerged as a major regional power in the 1970s.¹⁶ Just before Kissinger's visit, in a long conversation with Ross Terrill, an Australian expert on China, the Premier had become very agitated about the possibility of the United States working with reactionaries to revive "Japanese militarism," perhaps even giving the Japanese tactical nuclear weapons.¹⁷ It was a fear to which Secretary Laird contributed when on July 8, in Tokyo, he "helpfully declared" (as Kissinger wryly put it) "that he was not opposed to an independent Japanese nuclear capability and that the SALT talks would confirm a strategic parity that might provide an incentive for a Japanese nuclear program."¹⁸ Zhou had surely also studied Nixon's own strong statements about Japan's increased importance in East Asia.

Although U.S. policymakers had rarely worried about the reactions of a distant and alienated People's Republic to the postwar relationship between America and Japan, that alliance must have been an additional irritant to the Chinese. Certainly there was in Beijing a bedrock of concern and potential antagonism about it. Kissinger met the problem head-on: